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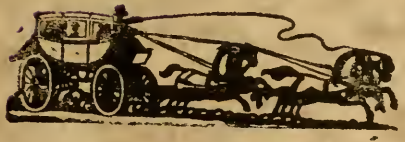
History of Custer County Idaho



By Jesse R. Black

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AUGUST 30, 1960

THE STATE OF IDAHO CONDUCTED A CONTEST FOR ALL HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS TO WRITE A HISTORY OF THEIR OWN COUNTY. DR. BLACK WON THE $5 FIRST PRIZE MONEY WITH THIS HISTORY WHILE HE WAS A SENIOR AT THE CHALLIS HIGH SCHOOL, CHALLIS, CUSTER COUNTY, IDAHO.

61- 37617

Material for this treatise has been secured from The Challis Messenger, and verified by Thomas Jose of Challis. Many other pioneers have contributed and verified. dates and occurrences.

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Custer County was formed in 1880 from the counties of Boise, Idaho, Alturas and Lemhi, and was named in honor of General Custer, famous because of his part in the Indian fight known as "Custer's Last Stand." It is located in central Idaho, with the county seat at Challis, so placed by popular vote in June, 1881. Challis won from Bonanza and Crystal by a majority of 19 votes, the latter being the closest. Many things have happened within the bounds of this county, of which no history has ever been written.

Probably the earliest events recorded deal with Indian troubles, a condition which is typical of all early history. It is said that H. F. Powell, while hunting, saw bones, but paid no attention to them. Later when Mr. Harland discovered them, he, by curiosity, picked up one of the skulls and noticed that some of the teeth had gold filling. This at once convinced him that the bones were those of white men, and he began an examination of the ground in that vicinity. Mr. Harland was not long in finding more skeletons. Only three could be found at first. Two were near together, in a hole, where, from all appearances, the fight took place. The third was found some rods from the others, and near it was a gun barrel, considerably bent. This is reasonable evidence that the owner was endeavoring to escape and, being overtaken, fought a good fight in his efforts to stand off his assailants. The barrel of one of the other guns was bent also, as if it, too, had been in a hand-to-hand encounter. The guns were all "muzzle-loaders" —one a common rifle and the other of the pattern used by the army prior to the adoption of the "breech-loaders." One bears the stamp on the lock, "C. S. A. '61;" the other was a Harper's Ferry musket with the date of 1831.

Mr. Harland reported his discovery on his return to Challis and a party went out to examine the battle-field and to gather up the remains. Other relics of a hard fought battle were found scattered around, such as gun-caps, rifle balls, a cap box, a fragment of cloth resembling corduroy, and the butt of a pistol. There were also several steel arrow heads picked up near the skeletons, and broken and decaying arrow shafts, as well as a broken bow. There has been nothing as yet that throws any light whatever on the terrible tragedy that occurred in that lonely camp years ago. Some of the party who assisted in gathering up the remains are of the be-

lief that the unfortunate ones who composed the ill-fated expedition were killed by the Indians.

There is more than ordinary interest attached to this discovery. Aside from the mystery connected with the destruction of the outfit, there is added that not unreasonable belief that there was a woman in the party. After making an examination of the different skulls found, Dr. Pickman, a physician in this section about 1880, pronounced the one containing the teeth with the gold filling as that of a female. The beautiful and symmetrically formed teeth, and the shape of the skull bones confirmed the belief.

Who the members of the party were, and at whose hands they met their fate, are mysteries that may never be solved. So long a time has elapsed since the occurrence, and there being no permanent settlers in this section of the country at that time, it is only a matter of conjecture as to the time and manner of their destruction. Up to within a few years ago, it was a very common thing for prospectors and immigrants to be swept away by the red savages that then infested the whole Salmon river country. The trailbuilders had both red men and road agents to contend with; sometimes these went hand in hand when the occasion required a union of the two forces of land pirates. Bones along the trail were not uncommon for this occasion; two theories have been advanced. At that time guns of any type were highly prized by the Indians and miners sometimes carried considerable gold with them. "Dead men tell no tales;" the bleaching bones on mountains and trails are as silent as the rocks, and cannot give up the secret which death holds.

The location of this point lies in a hole on the top of the most southern of the three small buttes, about one mile south of the Challis cemetery, and one-quarter mile west of the main highway. The date, according to some old Indians, was about 1845. This conflicts with the engraving on one of the guns, "C. S. A. '61;" whether this inscription represents the year of the tragedy or not we have no way of ascertaining.

From 1862 to 1870 Idaho was the center of many placer mine stampedes, and later, in 1879, occurred the Yankee Fork quartz rush, which was extraordinary. Only one of those who have been on such excursions can realize the extent of excitement that enters into every one, how he feels, and how all are buoyant with hope. While in this condition, often caused

by wild and most unreasonable stories, men will endure untold hardships and put forth every effort to be the first to reach some gold field. The Stanley Basin Stampede, although lasting a few years, was an exciting one. Gold was first discovered there late in the fall of 1863 at Kelly's Gulch, about sixteen and one-half miles from Stanley, by Frank R. Coffin, Dick Douglas, Robinson, Mathew Zipp and A. P. Challis. The mine, when first discovered at Kelly's Gulch, was known as the Summit Mine, until 1864. Immediately after the finding of the gold the discoverers departed for other sections of Idaho, in which to spend the winter. In April, 1864, a party of about twenty-five men left for Stanley. Among them was Douglas. They went down to Boise City, where provisions and other necessities for the journey were purchased. Then they hastily proceeded on their way, going by the Little Camas Prairie to the South Boise River, which they followed up to the extreme head-waters and passed over the Sawtooth range near the present town of Sawtooth. On the way they followed an old Indian trail to the Salmon, and on reaching the summit of the Sawtooth mountains, the loftiest and grandest range of mountains in Idaho, they experienced much difficulty in getting through the deep snow. At the time it was necessary for both man and beast to wade down the cold streams of Bear Creek, which was swollen by the melting snows.

When the Warm Springs on the Salmon, about forty miles above Stanley, were reached, a band of Indians made their appearance on the mountains near by. The prospectors were very anxious to find Kelly's Gulch, but others had reached it before they arrived. They tried to compromise with the Indians to come down and smoke the peace-pipe but they feared that the whites meant to kill them. Failing to get any information from the Indians the men hastened on and camped at the mouth of Valley Creek. A short time after going into camp a band of gold seekers who did not know the location of Stanley Basin, but had heard reports of the diggings, arrived. In a few hours two hundred men were at the camp, only three or four miles from the mines. When daylight dawned the following morning, there was a big rush. Many, leaving their provisions and blankets at camp, mounted their horses and galloped ahead, while those who had not provided themselves with animals went with all possible haste on foot. All, however, were doomed to disappointment, as the ground

was all taken in the gulch and on the bar. Buckley, former sheriff of Walla Walla county, Washington, was the lucky possessor of the good ground on Buckley's Bar. It still bears his name.

In a few days, finding that all the good ground had been located, the stampede dispersed, some of them returning to the camp from which they had come, while others scattered throughout the mountains in search of other places. One party of several men went through the Lost and Wood river country, but were not successful. They found some copper and galena ore, but considered it worthless; it is now the White Knob a very productive mine. Placer claims in Stanley are still successfully working, and old machinery can be found where mines have been deserted.

A few miles above Stanley, on the side of a hill one or two hundred yards from Valley Creek, are three forts in a row and a few feet distance from each other. They are built of unhewn granite boulders and have an ancient look, being almost filled with earth. When the first white man visited them in 1863, and built the cabin which still stands in a gulch north of the Duffy place, between the intersection of Valley and Stanley creeks, they appeared as old as they do at the present time. By whom they were constructed, or what their purpose was, will remain, as the massacre, unknown.

The following is an incident from the pen of Jud Boyakin, one of Idaho's pioneer editors, which occurred in Stanley Basin:

"A few evenings ago some old Idahoans met, and with lighted cigars, fell into a reminiscent mood, indulging in stories of early days long past when these grizzled pioneers were young men with smooth faces, and Idaho was a part of Washington Territory, with more Indians on its trails than white men. The conversation turned on great Atlanta, which at this time was attracting so much attention. The "Democrat" learned it was discovered in 1863, by the party of prospectors on the upper tributaries of the South Fork of the Salmon river, a region which at that time had never been trodden by the foot of white men. The party numbered twenty-three men, Frank R. Coffin being one of them. All had mined at Florence the previous year, a fabulously rich placer camp, situated in a basin twelve miles from the main Salmon. They were now going to look for a similar basin, which they felt certain would be found in the wild and

rugged mountains they were going to explore. Nothing of value was discovered until reaching Stanley Basin, named for Captain Stanley, the eldest man of the party. They found gold on two different gulches, but to work them involved the bringing of water a long distance. The remoteness of the country from supplies and the feeling of uneasiness on account of fresh Indian signs on their trail made it inadvisable, if not impossible for them to avail themselves of what in after years proved to be a rich placer camp.

"At Stanley the party divided provisions and separated; thirteen, under the leadership of Joe Haines, returned to Warren diggings. Attempting to go back by following the river, they got into deep canyons, where they had to abandon their horses, after killing some of them for food. Enduring great hardships and losing one of their number by death, twelve out of the unlucky thirteen reached Warren.

"The party of ten, consisting of Captain Stanley, Barney Parke, Ed. Deeming, Jack Frowell, Ben Douglas, Dan Lake, Mat Gardner, Frank Coffin, Lee Montgomery and one whose name has been lost, left Stanley the same day the returning party did. As their provisions were nearly gone, they hoped soon to find a pass through the mountains that would lead them to Boise county, or Bannock, as Idaho City was called at that time. They had gone about fifteen miles over the old Indian trail east of Stanley, when suddenly and unexpectedly they came onto a band of about sixty Indians camped on a large creek. In a twinkling of an eye the Indians disappeared in the tamarack of timber beyond them. This was a poser that called for a council of war. Dropping back on the trail behind the point that had brought them into view of the Indians, the veteran Stanley was appealed to for advice; but alas! he who had been through the fire of a scene of desperate Indian battles, and bore on his weather-beaten frame the scars as unmistakable evidence of his courage, was no longer a leader. The old man's nerve was gone, and he begged and implored the party to turn back on the trail and overtake the Haines company.

"In a short time after the Indians vanished into the timber, seven of them rode out in sight, with superb grace and dignity, and one of them dismounted, divested himself of his blanket and accoutrements, laid his rifle on the ground at his feet, and, raising his open palms upward, made

signs that he would like for one of the white men to meet him unarmed on the open ground between the two parties. Frank Coffin, being an accomplished Chinook linguist, was selected to meet the gallant brave. Observing the same formality that his red brother had, he proceeded to the ground designated by the Indian, for the talk. When they met, the Indian extended his hand, and with many assurances in poorly spoken Chinook, but very expressive sign-language, convinced Coffin that his people did not want to fight. The representative of the white men, in elegant Chinook, and with much impressive gesture, assured the red men that neither were his men on the warpath, but were gold hunters on the way to Boise county. The red ambassador was a splendid specimen of the North American savage, young graceful and supple as a leopard. On his way to Montana in 1867, Coffin met this Indian again, on the Wood river, near where the town of Bellevue now stands. The brave in his recognition, referred to Coffin's moustache, which had been added since their meeting in 1863 and reminded his white friend that he was no longer a 'papoose chief.'

"Proceeding a few miles along the trail from where they met the Indians, they left it and bore directly for what appeared to be a low pass over the range; but, after floundering around for two days in the timber and brush, they were confronted with towering cliffs and lofty prependicular mountain walls that barricaded their path. They had reached an elevation that enabled them to see that they would have to return to the trail they had left and travel further east before they could get over the range. Retracing their steps they struck the trail not far from where they had left it three days before.

"Near where they came to the trail again, on a freshly blazed tree, the adventurers read a history of their sensational meeting with the Indians in a beautiful pictograph. It was about five feet long and eighteen inches wide, and on its surface the artist had done his work so well in red and black pigment that every one of the ten men read it at once. On the upper end of the blaze they had painted the figures of nine men and horses, representing the number the white men had, and their only dog. On the lower end of the pictograph six mounted Indians and a riderless horse appeared, not far from which the artist had painted a rifle and the accoutrements of which the Indian had divested himself. In the middle

of the picture the two ambassadors were represented with clasped hands, Between them and the figure representing the white company, the artist had painted a miner's pick, near which was an arrow pointing in the direction the white men had gone. There was no mistaking the object of the pictograph; it was to advise their people passing that way that there may be or had been a party of gold hunters in the country."

This place is about 15 miles east of Stanley on Muley creek; however, no remains of a pictograph can be found there at present.

As far back as 1865, a party of easterners coming west in quest of wealth, made their way from Bannock, Montana, into the then strange and wild country of Loon Creek. For some time they camped at what seems to have been the meadows on the mouth of Warm Spring creek, eight miles below the subsequently famous placer camp on the main Loon. The party had several members; one of those was T. H. Cleveland. Cleveland being considered a tenderfoot, was the cook and when he reported finding yellow pannings in the nearby mountain, the other members of the party did not believe him. The party broke up and returned east where, afterwards it came to Cleveland to get assays on the ore containing the yellow substance. To his surprise it was very rich and he returned west, but his search was in vain.

In the spring of 1869 Liege Mulkey, Barney Sharkey and Bill Smith of Leesburg, Idaho, outfitted Nathan Smith to prospect on the headwaters of the Middle Fork of the Salmon river. Smith was considered a lucky prospector for placer mines. He was one of the party that struck Warren's diggings in the northwestern part of Idaho and had the honor of being the first one of the party to pan gold there. This man was also at Sulter's mill when Marshall picked up the first piece of gold found in California by a white man. Smith found diggings at Warren and various places in California and panned through the ups and downs of the California mining life before coming to Idaho. He and "Doe" Wilson, in the fall of '69 discovered gold at Yellow Jacket; of course this news caused another panic, but the mines proved worthless at that time, so they were soon abandoned.

Smith and his companions had been out several weeks when they reached Loon Creek, which is 88 miles from Challis, in the northwestern part of Custer county, the largest tributary of the Middle Fork. Here they found

gold which they claimed valued $2.50 a pan. They immediately returned to Leesburg and reported their find. As a result every man who could possibly get away stampeded to the new diggings, many coming even from Montana. This was in August, 1869; it increased and about 200 remained there during the first winter, but the next year, 1870 and 1871, it increased to about 800. The camp was booming and was known as "Oro Grande," being situated on a high bar on the west side of the creek. Gold dust was plentiful and business good. There were five business houses: McNutt & Philips, J. Gallatin & Cross, Walferson & Peck Bros. of San Francisco, Mart Obendorfer & Co. of Boise, besides several small dealers.

There were several large buildings in this place, but by the fall of 1872 it was abandoned and sold to some Chinese miners. In 1878 a lost bunch of the Sheepeaters, an Indian tribe, were in great need of provisions. The prospectors told them they had none to spare; the best thing they could do was to go down to old Oro Grand on Loon creek, to get some from the Chinamen. Captain Varney was supposed to have been the only eye witness of the fight. The Indians came into the camp about supper time, and their first act of violence was to kick over the coffee pot which was steaming on the camp fire. There were twelve or thirteen Chinamen; the Sheepeaters' band comprised twelve men and boys. In a few minutes they were fighting in earnest, nearly all of the Chinamen being killed. It was estimated that two of the Chinamen fled for Bonanza, but one of them was lost on the way; the other reached Bonanza. They left the provisions for the Indians, but it proved only a temporary relief, for Captain Bernard was sent to subdue them. Acting under orders from General Howard of Vancouver, three different companies headed by Captain Bernard and Lieutenants Catley and Farrow respectively, slowly and cautiously forced their way through the wilds of the Salmon river country, like hunters in search of game. And never had hunters more wily game. Bernard said: "They go from point to point much faster than we can, even if we know where to go."

The Indians surprised Catley's command, defeated them and captured their pack-train and supplies, so that they were forced to give up their part of the campaign. More troops were sent out, but it was Lieutenant Farrow who flanked the Indians' position and forced the entire

band of about sixty to surrender. After sixty-two days of marching over the snow-clad mountains and plains, he turned them over to General Howard at Vancouver. The victory took place on Loon creek, near its junction with the Middle Fork of the Salmon river, on August 20, 1879, but they escaped to cause more trouble. Farrow forced these Indians to surrender in the Seven Devils region on the following September 1, and this was supposedly the last of the Indian wars in Idaho.

In 1871, while the Loon Creek stampede was still on, Varney discovered mines on Jordan creek. His find was reported, and the population of Loon Creek stampeded to the future city of Bonanza. Varney sold his claims to J. G. Morrison in 1872. The usual life of a placer camp was two or three years; Bonanza was no exception. In the case of the Yankee Fork district, the claims were scattered out for some 15 miles along Jordan creek, thence into Yankee Fork and to the Salmon river. A meeting was called at that time for the purpose of laying off a townsite. Among the miners present were James McKim, I. S. Johnson and Elden Dodge, who constituted a committee to locate the streets. This was in February, 1877. They decided on Bonanza for a name, everyone present believing that was what they had struck. McKim and Johnson had already built a house on the new town site in the summer of 1876.

About July 1, 1879 the Yankee Fork Herald began publication, with M. M. Musgrove as editor. The issue of August 28, 1879 contains the advertisements of nine saloons, three hotels, two doctors and five lawyers in the city of Bonanza. The leading gambling house advertised thus: "Classy and Hogle, Bonanza City, Idaho. WE ARE HERE." George L. Shoup of Salmon City had a full column of advertising wines, liquors, clothing, drugs, furniture and miners' supplies. Another advertisement was as follows: "Celestial Laundry, Charlie Gumboo, Prop. This is by far the neatest wash house in the territory. Shirts nicely starched and beautifully polished."

The first white child born in that part of the country was a daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel McCall, whose birthday was on January 1, 1879.

The value and extensiveness of the mining here can be estimated by an article in the Omaha Republican, on August 15, 1879, which reads: "Yesterday we treated our eyes to some of the finest specimens of gold

and silver ore that was ever exhibited in Omaha. These have just arrived from the Yankee Fork of the Salmon river region, Idaho. There are some twenty pieces from these mines. The most beautiful and the largest pieces are from the famous Montana mine on Estes mountain, near Custer, and were literally glittering and interlaced with small nuggets and wires of pure gold."

Strange as it sounds, development had reached this stage without wagon roads, all supplies being brought in on the backs of horses and burros. The freight charge was 20c a pound. Even Custer was started in 1878 with no road, which is two miles from Bonanza. Bonanza is 66 miles from Challis and Custer is 68 miles. The townsite of Custer was laid off by Mordiff & Black and lots were given to anyone who would erect a building on them. The first house, or cabin, on the present site of Custer was built in the spring of 1878 by Sam Holman and "Doc" Adair.

By this time eastern capital and California capitalists and mining engineers were becoming interested in this country. Alex Topence was constructing a toll road through from Challis and Bonanza; the need of it was so pressing that two crews of men were kept at work, one at each end of the road. The first stage with its load of passengers slid into Custer on January 26, 1880 in a sled. The charges on the road as taken from an advertisement in the Yankee Fork Herald, were as follows:

One wagon and one span of animals	$4.00
Each additional span	1.00
Man on horseback	.50
Pack animals	.25
Loose animals, other than sheep and hogs	.25
Hogs	.15
Sheep	.10

H. MYERS—President.

Of course, the opening of the first road was a real occasion for a celebration after the most approved western style. A large feast was served, including such dainties as ice cream, candies, a dance following. Mrs. Belle Thompson was the first white woman in Custer and her son George, was

the first white child born there. She and her son are now living on a small farm about a mile and a half up Garden creek, above Challis.

There are several hundred small mines in Central Idaho, many of these being located near Custer and Bonanza which was a very rich section for minerals. Estes mountain near Custer, was a center of the mining. The Montana, Lucky Boy, Lost Swim, Big Chief, McFadden, Black, Golden State, Snowdrift and Buster Quartz mines are names of a few in this section. Montana mine was the richest and produced more than any of the others. Robinson Bar, now a popular summer resort, was once a placer mine. The Sunbeam mine, 57 miles from Challis, was booming and across Jordan creek from the Sunbeam village, and directly on the Loon Creek road, stood a hospitable wayside inn known as the Lake Hotel. The Bayhorse Mining District was located in September, 1863, but little was done until 1877 when Jack Hood, George Harland, Bob Beardsley, A. P. Challis, and Sam Blackburn started development. Some of these mines have minerals in them and Custer county is very active in mining as can be proven by the last reports ranking Custer county at the top for the production of minerals.

Challis, the county seat of Custer county, and one of its earliest towns, is still in existence and has increased to a population of about 500 at the present time. It was laid out in January, 1878, by S. G. Fisher and James H. Vancamp, according to Mrs. Vancamp, who is now living in Challis. The name is in honor of Alvah P. Challis. Mr. Challis mined all over the west, coming to Leesburg in 1867 and then to Loon Creek when the stampede was on. He came to Round Valley, the name of the valley in which Challis is located, and settled on Challis creek, a small stream about four miles north of Challis. He was one of the earliest of the white settlers in this part of the country where he, with his partner, raised cattle. Cattle business was not a success for him; instead, it caused him to go heavily in debt. He soon quit the cattle business and started placer mining again to defray expenses incurred while stock raising. He went to Stanley Basin—the group of claims now owned by his estate and by Mr. Sturkey. He was one of our noble pioneers; returning east in the fall of 1902 he passed away April 17, 1903, at Carbonsdale, Indiana.

The town is beautifully located under the overhanging brown cliffs, and looking out over the valley from Lone Pine Summit one sees a vast extent of mountains, each successive range rising higher and higher, like a vast ampitheatre. This mountain to the north of the town is a creamy mass of chlorite studding which contains a valuable supply of building stone of which the Challis High School is constructed. It is at the mouth of the canyon where Garden Creek flows out into the fertile valley and about three miles from the Salmon river. This river, with its rugged buttes and towering cliffs overlooking it, wends its way to the northward.

The fort which was made of stone and post in the summer of 1878 in Challis, on account of hostile Indians, does not stand. It covered the territory near the Challis cemetery and the home of Mrs. Hess, Mrs. Vancamp, Henry Nichols and others living in that vicinity. An old well which was used inside the fort can still be seen just below the home of Mr. and Mrs. Nichols; it is now nearly filled with earth. This fort was used only when the Indians were near. The homes were built along the creek, the first home still standing in a prominent position on Main street. It was built by "Doc" Stores. Another old building across the street from the Challis post office was built in 1897, as the date is written on the front. It was a meat market but now it is abandoned. The first school house stood where the old fox farm was. The first school teacher, Mr. Hainey, was a lawyer and later became well known. The logs of the old schoolhouse are now in the Garden Creek Cash Grocery on Main street, owned by John L. Hammond. Challis had a setback by fire on April 25, 1894, which took the most of the business section. Two of the old pioneers who were in the fort in 1878 are still living in Challis. They are Mrs. Funkhouser and Mrs. Vancamp, who can relate many exciting and hair-raising tales of those days. J. D. Wood was the first postmaster, who later became the head of the Wood's Livestock company.

Farming and stockraising—two of the valley's chief occupations—were carried on even as early as 1885, when a farm was tilled along the Salmon river, about four miles from Challis, which covers the places now owned by Joseph Rodgers, Frank Bradbury and William Chivers. The trees that were planted in that year are still alive around the farm home of the

Rodgers place, and about half a mile east of this home and about one mile from the Salmon river, is a cabin which was built in 1885. To John Stale is due the credit of proving that fruit could be raised in Round Valley. He spaded the earth and harrowed it with a wooden toothed harrow, which he drew himself. Now there are many producing orchards near Challis, cared for with modern inventions.

In 1883 Captain Bonneville, who had served with the Hudson Bay company, established a trading post in Round Valley. During the following year one of his associates, a Frenchman named Meershaw, made a trip to Snake river by way of Lost river, and said that the snow was so deep that the tops of trees were scarcely visible. In this year the buffalo were exterminated from Custer county on account of starvation.

While Challis was very small, yet prospering from the mines in this vicinity, one of the hardest Indian fights that ever took place in Idaho, was fought at Battleground. The victims were freighting supplies here.

Following are details of the fight, as enumerated by Daniel Wade and others, who were here at that time:

"It was in the summer of 1878. The Lemhi Indians were peaceful under the leadership of Chief Tendoy, which fact was a great aid to the settlers. The railroad terminated at Oneida, Idaho, and it was necessary to import all supplies by ox-teams into the interior. A large consignment of flour and general merchandise was assigned to Joe Skelton. The freight train, consisted of four nine-yoke teams, with three wagons to each team. George Dinsmore, with one nine-yoke team, joined our outfit. The personnel of the train was as follows: Joe Skelton, wagon boss; Joe Currier; Henry Skelton, brother of Joe; Will Bush, Daniel Wade and George Dinsmore.

"They loaded at Oneida, July 20, 1878, knowing that the Indians were hostile and that each was supplied with plenty of ammunition.

"The trail north from Oneida crossed the Portneuf river, at what is now Portneuf Canyon. Then they traveled north along the Snake river through Ross Fork to Eagle Rock, now Idaho Falls, to Mud Lake, now Roberts, to Camas Lakes and from Camas Lakes to Birch Creek. At Birch Creek they were instructed to look for a letter from Shoup & Co. They

reached Birch creek, but found no notice. If the Indians were on the Lost river side, they could have gone to Salmon as Shoup & Co., had a store there also. Finding no letter, their hopes were bright for a safe journey. The company traveled from Birch creek, along the cattle trails, making a stop at Jim Kennedy's ranch on Lost river, near Old Arco. The train pressed forward, and on August 10, came to the Narrows on Lost river, which was the most dangerous and difficult part of the route. After camp was made, Skelton rode ahead to see how the ground lay. On his advance he saw McCaleb and party from Challis, approaching and mistook them for Indians. Rushing back to camp Skelton shouted: 'Get your guns boys; get ready to shoot.' Every man went for his rifle. Upon nearing the camp McCaleb, who was bald-headed, took off his hat and revealed his identity. The visitors made known that the Indians had turned back from Oregon and were expected to arrive any day.

"After the mid-day meal they again yoked up the oxen and drove to the meadows, where they camped for the night. They had no guard, as they believed there were no Indians near. Next morning, while Harrington and Wade prepared breakfast the others went after the stock, which had strayed during the night. McCaleb's party went for the horses and the others for the cattle. The horses were brought in; however, the cattle did not arrive. Becoming anxious Wade got on a saddle horse and rode out to see if he could locate them. He met Dinsmore, who had seen one Indian which disappeared as soon as observed. They knew more Indians were near for they never traveled separately when on the war path. The camp was warned, but no preparation was made as they thought Dinsmore was mistaken. Wade and two others returned for guns, as the men were unarmed, and the Indians were between camp and the cattle. Pickets were sent out on the knolls east of the meadows, soon returning to report that they had seen a band across the river. The Indians ascertained they were being observed and modified their plan of attack, hiding in the willows. It was about 8 o'clock, and no defense was yet being made. When the pickets returned, all hands set to work arranging the wagons in a circle, with some of the animals within, digging trenches and piling flour up as a breastwork. McCaleb was in charge, as he had been in the Confederate army during

the Civil war and had been in 36 engagements during that time. He possessed a good general knowledge of military functions. While the work was yet unfinished, a few Indians came down and hallowed: 'Joe, can we come into camp?' He was speaking to Joe Raney, a half breed. This was partly in broken English, and he replied, 'No.'' Making his answer more emphatic, he took aim over the wagon wheel. The ball cut dirt among them and they scattered to the hills. At the first shot Indians seemed to spring out of the ground and began firing upon them. The camp was entirely surrounded and they kept up a continuous fire. They saw Trelaor's pile of yokes, and knew a man was there. They tried to shoot under and over the pile of yokes, to no avail, although Trelaor moved. McCaleb's portholes between the sacks were too small for much practical use. He moved to the left of his defense, resting his gun on a spoke and felly of the wagon wheel under which he lay. Skelton warned him to keep his head down. His gun was a Winchester repeater. He had just shot, and thrown the lever forward to eject the shell, when a ball from the enemy struck him squarely in the forehead, the shot first passing through his hatband.

''This was about 10 o'clock on the morning of August 11, 1878. Joe Currier was just in the act of crawling over Jesse's feet when the latter was shot. Wade lay opposite him in the corral and was not shooting at the time. We all knew that Jesse had been killed, although he uttered no sound. The heroic figure lay upon his face, and breathed occasionally until about 11 o'clock, when he expired. There was no motion of his body except the occasional breathing, he being unconscious to the end. Nothing was done for him—nothing could be done. His horse, too, was killed in the corral the same morning.

''The Indians did some excellent shooting. They splintered the spokes and cut the ground all around us. They aimed at the end-gate rods and bolts in the hope of getting a glancing missile to do personal damage. They shot into the sacks and covered us with flying flour. But the sacks stopped the bullets, excepting the top sacks, which a shot would sometimes penetrate. At noon we counted 57 Indians on the attack, but we knew there were more.

"In the afternoon an Indian whom, from later information, we believe was Chief Buffalo Horn, rode around the camp on a full run. He was not more than 100 or 150 yards away, but moved about on his horse, running generally on the further side. Everybody in the corral shot at him but couldn't bear him down. Joe Raney was one of our finest marksmen, but he sent a dozen bullets at this mark without success. It is inferred that this ride around the camp had been to induce us to expose our heads for the benefit of the sharpshooters outside.

"During the remainder of the afternoon, all was quiet. We kept our vigils, however, without intermission, and finally night settled down, leaving only a dim moonlight by which to scan the stretch of sage brush where lay the foe. About nine in the evening, the stillness was broken by a faint cry as of a coyote, a great way off. This cry was repeated again and again, each time sounding nearer. Then other coyotes joined the band and as they approached very near the camp their dismal bark was suddenly changed into the war-whoop of the terrific force, and the Indians rushed to charge the corral.

"Some were not the least frightened and spoke of experiencing the calmest composure, although hope flickered when McCaleb had been shot. But the time was past and surely there was not a man to do anything but shoot. Some believed the end had come. We shot as fast as we could in the direction of the sound, trusting to make the fusilade so hot as to run the attackers. In this we were successful, for the tumult and shouting died, and the enemy fled to cover.

"About 11 o'clock the charge was repeated, from the river side, the enemy approaching under cover of our cattle, driving the animals to the corral. We did not see them and the attack was a surprise.

"After the noisesome attack which we had repelled by a terrific fire, the Indians returned a safe distance and talked to us. 'Some of you have been killed, and we will kill all of you.' They also said that they had a white woman captive in their outfit. We had a little dog which seemed to enjoy the excitement of the fight. Whenever the reds came near, he would run out and bark with all of his might. The savages tried under cover of darkness to steal him. Once when the dog was very noisy, the reds from

the darkness said, 'Hello Boys; what's the matter with your dog?' Joe Raney thought he saw the buck who spoke and blazed away in that direction. Almost instantly three shots were returned from the brush, every one of which struck the wagon hub over his head.

"About 1 o'clock the height of the excitement quieted down. During this interval we wrapped the unfortunate man's body in a wagon sheet and laid him at rest. Jesse McCaleb had sacrificed his life for the progress of Idaho. We stood guard unceasingly, taking advantage of the quietness to build our breastwork higher.

"At 3 a. m. Wm. Trelaor, Joe Raney and Jack Flynn mounted and started for Challis, about 50 miles distance, to summon help; at daylight an Indian hallowed: 'Good morning boys, how you gettin' along?' At 6 o'clock on the morning of the 12th, we saw the last Indians riding out of the brush and moving down the river. We think that they left us that day. We did not leave our camp nor remove the guard. On the morning of the 13th, at daybreak, 30 men arrived from Challis. We rested until noon, until we were satisfied that the foe was gone. Then we found that they had roasted five head of our cattle in the willows. After noon we yoked and made a half day's drive. We camped safely that night, and next morning, still traveling with outpost, we dropped into Thousand Spring Valley.

"Moving up the valley, we suddenly observed a slight exciting character. Every scout was on the run to reach the wagons. The Indians were running them in. We at once corralled and made ready for the night. One poor fellow was so hard pressed that he left his horse and crawled into a hole, where he spent the night. Everything was made ready for trouble, but none came. We remained all the next day.

"On the morning of the 17th we moved out and at night camped at Antelope Springs. That morning our escort left us and went toward Challis. We had gone only about five miles when be met Jerome Calvin riding toward the Thousand Springs Valley. About an hour later he returned and told us he had seen a band of Indians who had crossed our trail behind us. We put out guards the best we could, and passed the night peacefully. On the night of the 18th we pulled down to the Salmon river and went into camp on the river.

"As soon as camp was pitched, a messenger from Challis told us to go into town that night, because a big Indian force was moving down the river. We yoked up, forded the river, and pulled to Challis that night, the 18th of August, 1878."

In November of the same year Colonel Shoup and others went to the Battleground; getting McCaleb's body, they took it to Salmon, where it was buried with signal honor, the whole country attending the funeral. He was first buried on a small knoll overlooking the battlefield, now the Mackay reservoir. A small fallen-down fence marks the place where the body was laid away. This can be seen from the highway on the point of the knoll in the horseshoe bend of the road.

"Not long thereafter, a force of friendly Indians, Shoshones, captured two reds, who were boasting of having assisted in the battle on Lost river. They were placed in the county jail at Salmon to await trial. The sheriff later turned them over to the Indian agent, who wanted to transfer them to a reservation, but learning that a dozen or so of the citizens were outside of the town, for the purpose of hanging the Indians, he tried to deliver them to the sheriff; the latter refused to receive them. By permission of George Wantz, the proprietor of the livery stable, they left them in the office. At night a crowd of unmanageable citizens took the prisoners away from the agent, led them out to St. Charles street, to the southwest corner of Jake Finister's field, and shot them.

The band which made the attack on the Lost river, was afterwards captured by General Miles. They numbered about 300, and, it is said, they were led by Chief Buffalo Horn. This Battleground is where the Mackay reservoir now stands. Mt. McCaleb stands near Mackay and was named in honor of Jesse McCaleb, whose courage and manliness were as lofty as the peak itself. The grave, as located, marks the spot where the faithful followers of McCaleb laid him at rest, after the fatal shot.

All travel was then accomplished by ox-teams; later horses were used. The sturdy Concord Coaches, drawn by four or six horses, lumbered through the ravines and sage brush flats. They were unable to make very rapid progress; therefore, stations were placed at intervals of a few miles each. Leaving Old Arco, the traveler would stop at Kennedy's on Lost river.

When this road was first completed, the first large shipment consisted of machinery for the Bonanza mine.

The passenger would, after leaving Kennedy's, advance to Old Houston, the largest town in this part of the country at that time. It nestled among the hills of Custer county, where the White Knob and Cliff Mountain ranges watch the glistening waters of Alder creek go noisily by. Visitors found all inhabitants buoyant with hope over the mining, agricultural, and stock raising advantages; for there was a great mining center with natural resources of unknown limit.

They had a fine school with about sixty enrolled. As one went up the tiny streets, some of the business houses he saw were the Lost River Mercantile Co., owned by B. F. Brown and J. H. Greene, the largest store in the county; The Houston House, a very popular hotel, owned by George Walburn; a saloon, managed by H. E. Gilbert; general merchandise, supervised by Levi Staples; Mrs. Ray Boones' Restaurant and Lodging; the Houston Meat Market, owned by C. S. Heinman; the Village Blacksmith Shop, owned by George R. Ashton. Only parts of the foundations remain now, it being deserted when the railroad came to the valley. This caused the town to be moved and the name to be changed to Mackay. The railroad came to Mackay in September, 1901.

The traveler was awakened at dawn usually, and was hurried on his way, the next stop being at Narrows. This site is now covered by the Mackay reservoir, where parts of the foundations can yet be seen, during low water. This same meadow is where the famous battle took place in 1878.

A stop was made at Cedar, twelve miles this side of Mackay, going toward Challis, and another at Whiskey Springs, about eighteen miles coming into the interior. Bascomn's station at Dicky, was an old fort which still remains, Baseomn living there. Lone Pine Summit was a station on top of the summit between Challis and Mackay. Here a runaway took place at one time, such as one reads about in western stories, and thrills over in picture shows. As the stages were the only means of taking out the miner's gold, it was a temptation for bandits to make a "holdup" and take the money at any price.

The old Jensen bridge, about three miles south of Challis, was used many years for the immigration to the mines. It still exists, though needing some repairs, but is not open for public use. The road came to Challis, not on the present course, but about one mile west and came into town about where Peek's Hill stands.

Challis was the center of the mining camps and the first road to Custer and Bonanza went up Garden creek, but later was built by the present way.

The old toll gates, of which a few old buildings still remain, were located at the mouth of Mill creek at Yankee Fork; the rates have already been given. The Fannie Clark station, as the toll gates were known, won considerable renown. Crystal was a small freighting town, which stood near the East Fork bridge, where a few old foundations can still be seen. The toll road from Challis to Loon Creek, via Packer Mountain, was completed on July 6, 1909. The first semi-weekly mail service from Challis to Bonanza was started on January 17, 1911.

An old Indian trail leading to Pahsamaroi, an Indian name meaning "Two Waters," named because of the two springs at the head of the valley, is still used by cattlemen entering the Pahsamaroi valley, at Trail creek.

Near Mahogany hill is an old corral made of woven willows constructed many years ago by the Indians. It is built in a narrow passage and could have easily been used by them to corral horses.

The first daily mail between Challis and May, Idaho, a small town about thirty miles from Challis, and ten miles from the mouth of the Pahsamaroi, was started on October 29, 1919. Stages still convey passengers, freight and mail from Mackay to Challis. Challis is the center of the other small towns in central Idaho, as Stanley, Forney, Clayton and May.

I have endeavored in this treatise to give a complete history of the County of Custer. This county, as many other small places, was settled due to the rich mining claims found in them. Here the most valued industry today is mining; our part of Idaho ranks among the first in production of various minerals. However, many of these little camps have been abandoned and all that is left to tell the history is a few fallen down buildings. One thing we do have, nevertheless, to show the history of the past, is a picture of the town of Custer, painted by Cridman, in 1880. A popular legend

told by the old folks is that he was a vagabond in need of money. The picture was his salvation. This picture is now hanging in The Messenger office at Challis. It well portrays the life of the early camps. What tales this picture could tell us would perhaps furnish entertainment for many a campfire chat. As one looks more closely, he can see a patched place in the center of it. Previously it hung in a saloon in Custer, and one night, in a moment of insanity a drunkard threw a bottle through it. The buildings are nestled in the gorges about the mill, against the towering mountains, covered with the beautiful pines. The tram-way leads down the mountain to the mill of thirty stamps, which could easily be recognized as such without the sign on the side: "General Custer Mill." Its remoteness and isolation is shown by the wild deer running along the mountainside. The homelike group of dwellings are nestled in the deep wood-laden ravines about the mill, making a natural picture of western life. The large comfortable boarding house was managed by Mrs. Normington of Wood River. Other buildings, including the office and store room, look out over the Yankee Fork, which flows quietly by the little village of industry and contentment.

Another thing we have to recall memories of the past, is the old Concord Stage Coaches, which were used to deliver freight, passengers and mail between Challis and Mackay. They have never been preserved, being drawn up and abandoned at the side of an old barn in Challis. These relics, nevertheless, force us to remember the hardships our fathers and grandfathers suffered in order to make for us Custer county, as it is today.

A tribute to these trail-blazers was written by Clarence Eddy:

"Dreamers they were, those pioneers;
Brave of spirit were the women folk.
And the bearded men were strong.
They cared not how rough the trail,
'Ho! Westward' was their song.
Where night drew its curtains of blue,
Lay the land they sought.
The land so large,
The land where dreams come true."

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